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ABSTRACT

This document describes an accelerated school project adopted in 1993 at the Blanche Pope Elementary School in the rural Oahu community of Waimanalo, Hawaii. The project is based on the key concept of "powerful learning," a belief that the education provided for gifted and talented children works well for all children. Every learning experience has three interrelated dimensions--what is learned, how it is learned, and the context in which it is learned. Two key processes used to transform students' learning experiences include formal processes and individual innovation. Formal processes include taking stock, forging a vision, forming governance structures, and using the Inquiry process. Innovations at the individual level typically are experiential, hands-on, interactive, and responsive learning experiences that teachers bring into their classrooms. The development phase included inservice training sessions, a school needs-assessment survey, and shared decision making. Ongoing activities include data collection, staff participation in professional development opportunities, and evaluation. (LMI)

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# Innovations

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*By Stan Koki*

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# Innovations

## Blanche Pope's Accelerated Schools Project: What a Difference a Year Makes

By Stan Koki

At a festive assembly in November 1993 to launch the Accelerated Schools Project, Blanche Pope Elementary School became the first school in Hawaii to be accepted as an Accelerated School. The assembly, which included songs, cheers, dancing, signed pledges, and other ceremonial flourishes, began when the student officers passed a canoe paddle to each other from the back of the audience until it reached the hands of the principal, Dr. Louise Wolcott. The passing of the canoe paddle symbolized the students' striving for excellence.

The canoe paddle was an appropriate symbol, because members of the *Hokule'a* were participating in the festivities. This Pacific team of navigators has been demonstrating that the ancient Polynesians were able to travel great distances without navigational tools other than their ability to use the stars, wave motion, and other natural phenomena to guide them. The crew of the *Hokule'a* was acknowledged as bringing a relevant message to the students and community at Pope School. They described their mission using terms

such as *unity, trust, and responsibility* to explain how they were able to accomplish their long voyage home to Hawaii on the canoe from Tahiti. They helped the students to make connections about their own learning and stressed the value of education. The members of the crew were impressed with the students' numerous questions, and took the time to visit with them in their classrooms.

"Blast Off to Excellence" (the theme of the assembly) was a day full of student empowerment. A teacher commented, "We hadn't done anything like this before. It brought the school closer together. The outcome was worth it!" Another teacher commented, "I'll remember this day forever. I couldn't believe this could be done by November 10. I'm so proud of all the teachers!"

Earlier, in spring 1993, the Blanche Pope School/Community-Based Management (SCBM) Council voted to adopt the Accelerated Schools Project as part of the school's implementation of SCBM on the belief that it would be of help in restructuring education at the school. Pope, which serves over

370 students in K-6, is located in the rural Oahu community of Waimanalo. More than 90% of its students are Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian. "I felt that the Accelerated Schools Project would put together for our school community the best of current theory and practice on effective schools and successful instructional strategies," commented the principal in explaining why the school decided to become an accelerated school. "Our school community was really ready for it!"

### The Accelerated Schools Project

The Accelerated Schools Project was established by Dr. Henry M. Levin and his colleagues at Stanford University to enable all students to enter secondary school "in the educational mainstream." Rather than lowering expectations for students in at-risk situations, the aim is to enhance their academic growth through challenging and stimulating activities, the type usually expected of gifted and talented students. Levin and his associates view the Accelerated Schools Project both as a way of thinking about academic accelera-

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tion for all students and as a concrete process for achieving it.

Traditionally, educational intervention for underachieving or non-achieving students has been remedial in nature. Their educational experiences are "dumbed down;" they are given less information in smaller chunks, and at a slowed-down pace. "The inevitable consequence of existing educational practices used with students in at-risk situations is to actually undermine the future success of these students," says Levin. "Even though these students start school behind other students in academic skills, they are placed in instructional situations that slow down their progress. They are stigmatized as remedial students or slow learners and assigned boring and repetitive exercises on worksheets. Their parents are often uninvolved in the school, and school staff are given little or no opportunity to provide more challenging and successful approaches."

### Powerful Learning

"Powerful Learning" is a key concept used by the Accelerated Schools Project. Powerful Learning is based on the belief that the education provided for gifted and talented children works well for all children. Accelerated school communities work together to create Powerful Learning experiences that treat each child as gifted. Complex activities with relevant content are stressed. Children actively discover the curriculum objectives in a safe and supportive environment, rather than passively going through textbooks and filling out worksheets. The Accelerated Schools Project believes that, with time, opportunities for Powerful Learning can extend far beyond the classroom into every aspect of the school, home, and community.

Powerful Learning experiences are predicated on the following values:

- **Equity.** All students can learn and have an equal right to a high quality education.
- **Participation.** Learning is interactive and relevant to the lives of the students.
- **Communication and Collaboration.** Learning experiences allow for student interaction and cooperation.
- **Reflection.** Learning experiences promote critical thinking and holistic understanding.
- **Experimentation and Discovery.** Learning experiences use novel approaches to learn about the world.
- **Risk-Taking.** Opportunities must be provided for students to take risks in a safe environment in order for them to learn.
- **School as the Center of Expertise.** Everyone in the school community is an expert who can contribute to provide Powerful Learning experiences for students.

Belief in these values empowers the school community to create Powerful Learning experiences for all students based on the school's unique needs, strengths, resources, and vision.

### Interrelated Dimensions in Learning

The Accelerated Schools Philosophy is that every learning experience has three interrelated dimensions—*what* is learned, *how* the content is learned, and the *context* in which all learning resources are brought together by the teacher in order to provide a setting for the *what* and *how*. Levin and his associates believe that learning experiences that are powerful are more likely when teachers make use of their knowledge of *what* children like, need, and want to learn; *how* they best learn; and what types of

*contexts* best support and promote this learning. "Our philosophy views these three dimensions as *totally and necessarily integrated*," they emphasize.

### Big Wheels and Little Wheels

Two key processes that school communities use to transform students' learning experiences have been identified by the Accelerated Schools Project. The project refers to these two processes as "big wheels" and "little wheels."

The term "big wheels" refers to the formal processes of accelerated schools: taking stock, forging a vision, setting priorities, forming governance structures, and using the Inquiry Process. Taking stock is a self-assessment conducted by the school. Forging a vision is the process of using available data to develop a vision statement. Setting priorities is the process of identifying the primary challenge areas that need to be addressed to get the school "from here to there." Forming governance structures means creating the three levels of decision-making and communication at the school: the cadres, steering committee, and the school as a whole. The Inquiry Process is a problem-solving approach used by cadres at the school to examine the school's problems or "challenge areas." Hypotheses are formed to guide the investigation of each challenge area by a school cadre. This process enables the school to become objective in its analysis and understanding of problems, and more insightful in determining the best solutions to be implemented.

At Pope, cadres are using the Inquiry Process to help accelerate students' learning. In order to create powerful and long-lasting improvements, an accelerated school must use these systematic and collaborative big-wheel processes.

"Little wheels" represent the ideas and innovations that individuals in the school bring to fruit-

tion, beyond their work in their cadres. These typically are experiential, hands-on, interactive, and responsive learning experiences, as opposed to worksheets or questions at the end of the chapter in a textbook.

Because big wheels tend to move slowly, and teachers like to see change quickly, the little wheels of the accelerated schools process are the innovations that teachers are encouraged to introduce immediately in their classrooms. An accelerated school community empowers teachers, alone or with others, to be free to experiment whether it is designing a thematic unit based on the teacher's favorite hobby or having students participate more actively in planning the curriculum.

Through the big wheel and little wheel innovations, changes in accelerated schools happen simultaneously. Change occurs in many places, at different speeds, at different levels, and for different individuals.

### Pope's Accelerated Schools Project

While implementing the Accelerated Schools Project at Pope School, stakeholders in the school community participated in ten inservice training sessions throughout the 1993-94 school year. These sessions were conducted by the school's two Hawaii-based coaches and a member of the National Center at Stanford University. Increased commitment to the project among members of the school community is becoming very evident. There is recognition of increased personal and professional growth. Individuals have come to realize and accept that it will take a major shift in their thinking to apply the philosophy and training of the Accelerated Schools Project to the daily lives of students.

In addition to inservice training opportunities, the faculty and staff

at Pope conducted surveys and research, working through the school as a whole (SAW) structure. The purpose was to take stock of where the school was in areas considered to be important to parents, community members, staff, and students. Six committees were formed to investigate critical areas of schooling: curriculum and instruction; organization and staff; school climate; budget, finance, and resources; parent and community; and students. In addition, a coordinating committee was formed consisting of representatives from each of the six committees.

Based on the results of the data that the SAW collected, the SAW began to set priorities for school improvement consistent with Pope School's vision. The priorities were reached through consensus. "Without consensus, we won't move!" was the reminder of the school's coaches, Ms. Francine Honda and Dr. Zoe Brown, who had received training at Stanford University on the Accelerated Schools Project during the previous summer. These two are responsible for providing technical assistance to the school community, and reporting to the National Center at Stanford University on Pope School's application of the philosophy and processes of the Accelerated Schools Project.

From the gap between where the school was and where it wanted to go, members of the Pope school community initiated the Inquiry Process used by all accelerated schools. Levin and his associates believe that an important part of being an accelerated school is learning to work together in facing the school's challenges. Accelerated schools use a systematic approach to problem solving. "It's a way of recreating your school from the ground up, of transforming the school into a vibrant community of learners. It's exactly the opposite of traditional 'teacher-proof' edu-

cation, in which someone from the state or district comes in and dictates what you must do and how you must do it," states Levin.

The concerns identified during the earlier stages of taking stock and setting priorities are now being studied by the SAW Pope School. The school community will clarify the directions, priorities, and concerns that it wants to address so that its vision can be attained.

On May 27, 1994 Pope Elementary School's first-year journey toward becoming an accelerated school reached a critical juncture. This was the day that the school set aside for its *Ho'ike* Vision Celebration to rally the school community together as a unified group to celebrate the achievements of the Accelerated Schools Project at Pope. The theme of the celebration — "A Journey Through Hawaii and Polynesia" — was expressed through a gala program and activities that deeply involved students, parents, faculty and staff, and members of the community. The event was summarized by Kahulu Landgraf, on-site coordinator for the Accelerated Schools Project at Pope, with great enthusiasm. "The *Ho'ike* Vision Celebration was a day that belonged to our children. They achieved and performed with excellence. We are all so very proud of them. Indeed, they are accelerated!"

### The Work Ahead at Pope School

As an ongoing dimension of the Accelerated Schools Project, Pope Elementary must continuously gather data for school improvement. Documents to be collected and shared with the school community include products emanating from the project, news items, examples of student work, data on parent participation, and other outcomes that demonstrate successes being achieved by the school. This information will be used by the

SAW in communicating to various role groups and funding sources.

To date, financial support through the Harold P. Castle Foundation and an ESEA Chapter II Effective Schools Grant has been secured to allow the instructional staff to attend professional development courses, seminars, and workshops. Additional grant monies from the Hawaii State Department of Education's Incentive and Innovation Grant Program and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs helped to provide opportunities for the instructional staff to receive further training and knowledge of the latest techniques, strategies, and approaches to facilitate student learning.

Twice yearly, the school coaches must submit a Trainer's Evaluation Report to the National Center at Stanford University. Dur-

ing the fourth year of this five-year project, the Department of Education will conduct a formal evaluation of Pope's Accelerated Schools Project.

"We are still in the beginning stages, but just being able to come together as a total school was an experience for me," said one parent about the project. "To see everyone working together for one goal—to create the best school for ALL of our children in our community—will be a great feat. I now feel that as a parent I am an important member of the group. I know the Accelerated Schools Project will have the same effect on our children, if not more."

For more information on Pope's Accelerated Schools Project, contact Ms. Francine Honda in the Windward District Office at (808) 247-3382, or Dr. Zoe Brown, State Testing Office at (808) 735-2019.

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